

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MAURICE D. HINCHEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 21, 1997

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I was delayed on route to the Capitol following a meeting with constituents in my congressional district during the votes on H. Res. 152. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

ARLENE NUNES' GUARDIAN ANGEL

HON. BARNEY FRANK

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 21, 1997

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, all of us in Congress are called upon from time to time to provide assistance to people who live in our districts and require some guidance in dealing with the complexities of one or another bureaucracy. One of the people that the excellent staff in my office have been able to help is Ms. Arlene Nunes. I was therefore especially moved when I saw Ms. Nunes recently and heard her describe the events which are chronicled in the accompanying article. The point is that Ms. Nunes having herself been in a situation where she experienced health problems and called on us to help her in dealing with a bureaucratic maze, drew strength from this and was for precisely this reason eager to help someone else who was in trouble. I was especially impressed by Ms. Nunes' assertion that precisely because she has herself asked others for assistance, she was inspired to provide literally life saving assistance to someone else at a difficult period. To go from the illness she had within a short period of time to being literally a life saver for a fellow human being is not only an extraordinary experience, but indicative of an extraordinary individual, Arlene Nunes, and I am proud to share this experience with others as an example of how adversity of a personal sort can sometimes be strengthening and bring out the best in us.

ARLENE NUNES, AS TOLD TO VERONICA CHATER

The blue-green sea spread out before me like a blanket as I waded into the warm water of Lydgate Lagoon on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Could a month in paradise help me heal? I wasn't sure anything could.

Only a month before, I'd been lying miserably in a hospital back home in New England, admitted for heart problems and exhausted from multiple sclerosis.

"My daughter and I are supposed to be on a plane to Kauai!" I told the doctor.

"Don't worry," my 23-year-old daughter Dorene reassured me. "We'll just postpone the trip. It's not the end of the world."

But it felt like it. At 49, with my divorce behind me, I wanted to believe I still had a lot of living to do. But instead, my heart was racing, my left side was weak—and I felt I was falling apart.

Lying in bed, 17 long days had passed while I wondered if I'd ever feel strong again. But this trip would do more for me than I could have imagined.

The sun was on my face as I fed tropical fish. I wanted to dive into the glassy blue,

but my doctor's words echoed in my mind. *Take it easy.*

I'm not much of a swimmer anyway. As a young girl, I had gone swimming in a lake and gotten a cramp in my leg. Before I knew it, I was under. Please help me! I panicked, my lungs ready to burst. Finally, someone pulled me out. But ever since, I couldn't put my head underwater, I'd just paddle and float.

So I paddled and floated out, and when I could no longer feel the sandy floor, I let the water just support my body.

I watched a man swim to shore to look after his three children while his wife went in, scuba gear in hand. Then I kept floating out—about 100 feet—to the deepest part of the lagoon.

There may have been 10 other swimmers, or rather, snorkelers, their breathing straws skimming and bobbing. But my vision was drawn farther out. That's the mother of those children, I realized. It was her jerking movements that had caught my eye. Without making a sound, she threw up her arm, which twisted like a corkscrew. And she was gasping as she tried to yank off her diving mask.

Instantly, I knew I was witnessing an epileptic seizure; I had seen one years ago. And now, there was only still water where the young mom had been.

My mind went blank as my body took over. I paddled over as fast as I could, my heart pounding. And then, without thinking, I dove beneath the water.

I don't even remember pulling the woman to the surface. But suddenly, there I was, floating, holding on to her with my stronger right arm to keep her afloat. And then I found my voice and screamed. "Help!"

None of the snorkelers heard me. So I kept screaming, trying to keep the woman—convulsing and grabbing me—from pulling us both under.

On shore, I saw Dorene jump at the sound of my voice, and she started hollering too. And then the woman's husband realized. "Ellen," he cried "Ellen!" The sound of his plaintive cries made my heart break.

I can't wait for help, I thought. We have to get to shore. So with my weak left arm, I swam with all my might. Will we make it? I panicked. But then I saw a man swimming quickly toward us.

Panting, he reached us. "She's having a seizure!" I cried.

"Take her legs," he coughed, and together we towed her to shore.

When my feet finally touched bottom, I shouted to the crowd: "Get a doctor!" As it turned out, there was one on the beach, who performed CPR and emptied her lungs of water. Within minutes, she and her family had disappeared in an ambulance.

Standing in the water, I realized for the first time what had happened, and I started to sob. My fellow rescuer came toward me. "You saved her life," he said.

"We did," I replied.

"You know," he said, "I'd postponed this vacation because I was ill. I was just wading in the water..."

Then I told him my own story. For a moment we just stared at each other, knowing we had shared something incredible.

Maybe it wasn't just a coincidence that we were here to save that woman, I thought. Maybe, just maybe, God wanted to give us something: the feeling of strength when we felt weak. To show us something: that we could do something wonderful for another when we weren't sure what we could do for ourselves.

We called the hospital and found that Ellen had been released. She never knew that the stranger who reached out for her that day was me.

I think about Ellen a lot. Whenever I feel tired or weak, I remember the feeling of my legs and arms moving furiously and a sensation of power taking hold. If I could pull a woman out of the ocean, I can do anything!

If you ask Ellen, she'd probably tell you that I was her guardian angel. But if you ask me I'd have to say she was mine.

NATIONAL INTEREST IN RURAL HIGHWAYS ACT

HON. JOHN R. THUNE

OF SOUTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 21, 1997

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues are aware, Congress is in the process of developing legislation to reauthorize highway and transit programs. To ensure vital transportation links are maintained into the 21st century, we must address rural America's needs as well as America's need for a strong rural America.

The National Interest in Rural Highways Act would ensure rural States receive adequate funding. These States need a level of funding that ensures a seamless transportation system. The Nation does and must continue to benefit from effective transportation in and across rural areas. Without good highways across the plains and mountains, people and goods cannot move efficiently between the west and the east coasts. Yet these States with large land areas and sparse populations cannot support these national interest roads without a Federal investment. The bill would help meet this goal by establishing a small pool of funds to be allocated to States that have a population density of 25 people per square mile or fewer and cover a total area of 10,000 square miles or more.

The allocation from this pool of funds would supplement the State's regular allocation. The allocation would help meet the special needs of States that depend so heavily upon highways. The States that would qualify for this program would be Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

The total fund would constitute a mere 1.25 percent of the authorized appropriation of the highway trust fund (excluding the mass transit account). The distribution formula would be based upon two factors. Half of the total allocation would be distributed to each qualifying State based upon the total number of NHS miles in the State. The other half of the allocation would be based upon the number of vehicle miles traveled on the NHS within the eligible State.

The need for this legislation is clear. Without good roads in and across these States, regional and national movement is stymied.

And while these States enjoy some of the benefits of mass transit and passenger rail service, these are services that largely go unused in our area of the country. Quite frankly, the costs too often outweigh the benefits. Families, businesses, and industry depend largely upon roads and highways for their day-to-day business. As an example, South Dakotans annually pay over 30 percent more per capita in motor fuel taxes than the national average.

Highways act as the lifeline between these communities. In the State of South Dakota, agriculture and tourism are the top two industries. For agriculture, roads and bridges allow